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*Serving, promoting and protecting the agricultural producers, processors
and consumers of Missouri's food, fuel and fiber products.*

January 10, 2003

Dear Editor:

I watched with interest this week as activists and automakers sparred on the patriotism of driving fuel-hungry sport-utility vehicles. While it is absurd to claim that SUV drivers support terrorism because they drive vehicles that use gas made from imported oil, it does serve one valuable purpose – it allows a reasonable discussion on renewable, domestic energy production.

Most Americans would agree that we're too dependent on foreign oil. But, there are other options. Ethanol, primarily made from corn, and biodiesel, derived from soybeans, are two alternative fuel sources made from domestic crops grown in abundance throughout the nation. In fact, Missouri ranks seventh in soybean production and ninth in corn yields.

The war on terror and the instability in the oil-rich Middle East should help us focus our domestic discussion on fuel production, in addition to fuel conservation. Alternative fuels are growing in acceptance and demand, but additional research, education and infrastructure development are needed to make these fuels standard at American filling stations. The arguments are obvious: alternative fuels are cleaner burning, reduce our dependence on foreign oil, provide a value-added market for our agricultural products, and strengthen the farm economy.

We Americans like our sport-utility vehicles, in part, because they give us a feeling of independence. Shouldn't we work to build an energy policy that makes us feel the same about the fuel we put in them?

It's time we reshape this debate. It's more important than ever that Congress enact standards to increase renewable fuel use nationwide and consider additional incentives for renewable fuel production and use. Support of terrorists aside, if we pursue any other course of action we will continue to sacrifice our precious independence.

Sincerely,

Lowell Mohler
Director of Agriculture